

Testimony of:

**Andrea Northup
D.C. Farm to School Network, Capital Area Food Bank**

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Thank you very much for this opportunity to testify regarding health and wellness programs in Washington, DC public schools. My name is Andrea Northup and I coordinate the D.C. Farm to School Network, a program of the Capital Area Food Bank. The Network aims to improve child health in the District by increasing access to healthy, local food in school meals. In this testimony, I'd like to give you an outline of how farm to school programs in the District are flourishing, and explain some of the important key steps we need to take to ensure that D.C. schoolchildren have access to fresh, healthy foods in their school meals.

The primary issues related to health and wellness in Washington, DC are child obesity, and child poverty. We have the *third highest* child poverty rate and the *ninth highest* percentage of overweight and obese children in the nation. A stunning 81% of D.C. children are reportedly NOT getting their recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. One in two are at risk of hunger.

Most children get their main meals each day at school, especially during these tough economic times. Hunger and malnutrition have serious short-term effects on child health, cognitive function, growth and development. If underserved, these at-risk youth will become unhealthy, unproductive adults in the long-term. It's shortsighted not to see the costs that will accrue down the road if we don't act to address the epidemics of child hunger and obesity NOW.

Farm to school programs address these issues by connecting schools with local farms in order to serve healthy foods in school meals and educate kids about where food comes from. The bottom line is that when local foods are served in school cafeterias, and kids feel a connection to them, they eat more servings of healthy foods like fruits and vegetables. It's been proven in cafeterias through studies nationwide.

Over the past year, the D.C. Farm to School Network has been able to work with both DCPS and public charter schools in Washington, DC to increase the availability of healthy, local foods on D.C. cafeteria trays. We have successfully:

1. Raised farm to school awareness in the community, engaging an ever-broadening grassroots network of farm to school stakeholders;
2. Facilitated lasting connections between D.C. school food service operations and purveyors of local products for use in school meals and;
3. Spearheaded educational and celebratory events for students and other stakeholders; and
4. Leveraged the collective energy of stakeholders to achieve policy change.

As a result of our efforts, Washington, DC schools are serving more healthy, local foods in school meals. We held a D.C. Healthy School Meal Workshop in partnership with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education. At the Workshop, 87 school representatives and school food service providers learned how to incorporate healthy, local foods into their school food service operations. Over 30,000 D.C. students tasted farm-fresh local dishes in their school meals during D.C. Farm to School Week in October, 2010, and we helped 28 schools coordinate special events for the week - kids harvested fresh produce on farm field trips, and used their bounty to prepare healthy, delicious dishes with local chefs during interactive cooking demonstrations. We facilitated buyer-grower meetings between school food service providers and local growers, suppliers, and/or distributors interested to provide healthy, local foods for D.C. school meals.

To read more about the many schools serving healthy, local foods - and getting their students excited to eat them - please visit www.dcfarmtoschool.org.

One of the key results of our advocacy efforts is that the Healthy Schools Act. The Act has attracted national recognition for its comprehensive approach to improving child health and wellness. It sets high standards for school nutrition, expands access to school meals, increases physical and health education requirements, and more. The Farm to School section of the law requires schools to serve healthy, local foods in school meals whenever possible, encourages farm to school education, and provides a 5 cent per meal incentive for schools that serve fresh, local produce.

Funding for the Act was saved in December 2010 after proposed budget-gap closing measures by then Mayor Fenty threatened to remove Healthy Schools Act funding for FY2011. Schools are beginning to be able to claim this farm to school reimbursement, and spend it on fresh, local produce for their students. Healthier, tastier meals are being served in cafeterias city-wide. Schools have re-written contracts with their food service vendors. Jobs have been created as schools replace processed convenience food with from-scratch meals using high quality ingredients. More students are participating in school meals, and parents and students are behind the reforms. The Healthy Schools Act is stimulating incredible change against the rising tides of child obesity and hunger.

My message for you is that schools can NOT sustain exciting changes like these without funding and guidance from the Healthy Schools Act. For health and wellness of the 70,000+ children currently attending D.C. Public and public charter schools, we must continue to assure funding and support for the Healthy Schools Act.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I am happy to answer any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

Andrea Northup

Coordinator, D.C. Farm to School Network
Capital Area Food Bank
andrea@dcfarmtoschool.org
(202) 526-5344
www.dcfarmtoschool.org

